

# Jet du bas dit AA l'eau guet avec l'invisible

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WITH THE PARTICIPATION  
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PRODUCED BY THE LEONARD & BINA ELLEN ART GALLERY



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Photo: Alexandre St-Onge

## WAYS OF THINKING

*Ways of Thinking* is designed for anyone interested in exploring contemporary art and its exhibition framework. It succinctly synthesizes information on the exhibition's concept, the artists and the works featured. For the complete version of *Ways of Thinking*, please see our website: <http://ellengallery.concordia.ca/ways-of-thinking/current/?lang=en>

***Jet du bas dit AA l'eau guet avec l'invisible*** is a performative installation exploring the heuristic potential of an improvised creative process where the active apprehension of emergent contingencies is omnipresent. In dialogue with artists as well as the exhibition site itself, invisible performances are reembodyed in audio, textual, and visual material that attests to the transformation of a source that is always already inaccessible.

Performances developing out of sight within the wall at the centre of the space, unfold in different ways in each of the Gallery's spaces. In one room, a textile surface, under which lie sound objects, is enlivened by motorized entities reacting to the performative actions transformed into sounds, while in another, various forms of textual translations of these same acts are presented. In a third room, the invisible is revealed through a partial view of what exists within the wall, real-time documentation by surveillance cameras of certain performative details accentuating that being is not necessarily to be perceived. The invisible performative body is deployed into new acoustic, textual and visual bodies testing the unseizability of the origin as intensified by these transformative processes as signs of emancipation.



For *Jet du bas dit AA l'eau guet avec l'invisible*, Alexandre St-Onge has arranged the Gallery as a site for a multi-week experiment. Performing within the Gallery's central wall at fixed times over the course of the month and joined periodically by guest collaborators, the results of these obscured dialogues and performances are transmitted or deposited within exhibition spaces in the form of text, sculptural interventions, sound, and video. By displacing the performing body and shifting and reinvesting in the Gallery's overall architecture, St-Onge puts into motion an experimental process that defers arriving at any one result, favouring instead a long foray following the sense of uncertainty that initiates the experiment.

As is apparent from the title of this project, writing and the reception of text is a key part of St-Onge's practice. Among the resources here is a set of key words authored by St-Onge. These parallel notes present various angles and an expanded vocabulary for you to consider and engage with the processes underlying the project.

In addition to St-Onge's voice you'll also find guiding questions co-authored by the Gallery's 2019 curatorial intern, Hanss Lujan Torres and Robin Simpson, Public Programs and Education Coordinator. Composed in advance of the project, these questions depart from a highly speculative position. They are, simply said, written before the fact. Pragmatic exercises in dialogue with St-Onge's definition of the term, they imagine the possible effects of the project on the visitor. You are now, if visiting the Gallery, also in the position of being *before* the project. This is to say you are present within it, available to enter into a dialogue with it as well as the anterior thoughts and questions found below, the result of an anticipative and imagined visit.

# KEYWORDS

## THE SONIC BODY

Transformation of the performative body via its own sonic mediations is ubiquitous in this project, where the conversion of organic source material into sound waves gives rise to entities that are fully independent from their origin. For example, the voice escapes from the body, and, in the process, becomes a new sonic body able to express ungraspability by obscuring an original source that, in any case, has always already moved on to other things. The voice articulates the undecidability of the body as it emerges from the body while also moving away from it, hovering just out of reach to act as an intermediary between the interiority and exteriority of this same body. The voice thus already embodies a transitional process that can be amplified through recording and processing technologies. Indeed, the recorded voice is no longer emerging from an organic body; it is now the result of electrical transmission, rather than the vibration of vocal cords. In this sense, technological mediation makes possible the translation of recorded information, and, in so doing, stages the re-embodiment of this information into a new, inorganic body of sound.

## EFFECTS

*Jet du bas dit AA l'eau guet avec l'invisible* embodies a set of structures and devices that I qualify as being psychedelic, as they focus specifically on the effects brought about by our transformative and hallucinatory relationships to things. Seeing as causes, origins and internal structuring principles are more often than not enigmatic and ungraspable, it is preferable to work from tangible relationships between things, rather than attempt to grasp their essence. Favouring relationship over essence implies transformative processes that ensure a certain hospitality to becoming. Mourning and accepting the death of the origin enables emancipation from both the self, and that which lies beyond the mind. Structures and devices operate here in manner much more akin to magical thinking than rational thinking, in that they are inclined towards pragmatic knowledge stemming from the effects they produce, and from the efficiency of these effects as effects.

## IMPROVISATION

Improvisation – as a method for action-based grasping of contingent becoming – is crucial to this project, focused as it is on exploring the heuristic potential of an improvised creative process whose primary goal is to allow us to observe the as yet unknown conceptual entities that might emerge from it. Improvisation necessarily raises issues that are pragmatic in nature, as it concretely puts the transformative agency of an action to the test. Pragmatism focuses on an experimental practice of becoming that operates by trial and error, and that can be reviewed and modified

progressively, in order to better accommodate the indeterminacy of that which transpires. An improvised process opens a door onto the unpredictability of becoming, whereas the improviser themselves is constantly grasped by this becoming, before they themselves are able to grasp it. The pragmatic translation of these emerging contingencies via the act of improvisation thus allows the improviser to discover possibilities beyond or below their intentions, while generating material that takes on a new agency, separate from and independent of the improviser themselves.

## INVISIBILITY

The idea of invisibility speaks to many elements present in the project's structures and devices. Most obviously, we are confronted with the invisibility of performances hidden from us inside a wall that both separates and connects the different gallery spaces. The only exception to this invisibility is a partial point of access via video projections that, by isolating a small visual fragment of activity taking place within the wall, amplify the fact that "being" is not necessarily "being seen". Indeed, things do exist, independent of whether they are perceived or not. The fact that we are unaware of a given thing or event has no bearing on whether the thing actually exists, or whether the event has actually taken place. Many phenomena elude our perception, and the act of considering these unperceived things is in itself a promise of hospitality. *Jet du bas dit AA l'eau guet avec l'invisible* indeed aims to accommodate the many spectres that live beneath this particular shroud of mourning, notably through the performative body's ghostlike reincarnation in the form of a sonic body.

## TEXTUALITY

The textual and poetic approaches used in the project challenge the possibilities of how a code (performative, sonic, computational, etc.) can deterritorialize linguistic protocols in order to generate a new poetic idiom, one that moves away from natural language and follows its own rules. These rules often deviate from those stipulated by the normative grammars of French or English, for example. The hermetic mode of writing this implies follows in the tradition of sound poetry and concrete poetry, where the poem – a reality unto itself – can be independent of meaning or express undecidability between the spoken and written word. This mode of writing also makes use of various forms of technical mediation that enable the generation of new linguistic forms: handwriting and typography, as well as computational and other technological means of recording and processing language.

## TRACES

The processes involved in the realization of *Jet du bas dit AA l'eau guet avec l'invisible* give rise to an accumulation of traces over the initial three-week creation period, while the last week is dedicated to the exhibition of these traces. Traces amplify a mourning for the origin, both through its erasure, and its survival via differentiation. By entering into the interplay of difference, the trace embodies a form of relationship to the other that cannot be conflated with sameness, encompassing as it does a difference that isn't reducible to the unicity that typifies this same sameness. This difference in and of itself presupposes the impossibility of any systematic unification or totalization that might allow for a distinction between the same and the other, or indeed between the natural and the artificial. The trace, as such, generates difference and expresses the ungraspable nature of the always already transformed origin that itself ensures hospitality towards that which can and does transpire.

## TRANSLATION

Translation points to the ungraspable nature of origin while at the same time producing differences through repetition. That which results from translation embodies a transformation of the original that no longer corresponds to it, all while ensuring the original's survival by maintaining its ungraspability. The necessary paradox of translation indeed stems from this impossibility of faithfully transposing the original. Translation re-embodies the original in a mode that is unknown to the original – this is why a translation must always conceal its origin, even though this origin survives precisely by way of the mutation that translation instigates in the process of foregrounding its own becoming. Despite everything that exists within the space between the original and the translated end-result, translation embodies intangibility, and, by extension, that which cannot be shown. Translation is thus both relational and transformative.

The technological structures and devices used in the project are also translators, recording and transforming as they do information stemming from the performative actions carried out. These structures and devices

are indeed designed to be machines of translating emergence capable of establishing a relationship with the ungraspable while also allowing access to otherwise inaccessible information, for example, sounds that are inaudible without recording or amplification technology. However, it is also during the recording process of information generated by the performative body that these machines transform, and indeed erase the organic body via its translation into digital data, electrical signals and sound waves.

# EXPLORE

How do you make sense of your surroundings? St-Onge has allotted three different senses or sensibilities to the Gallery's spaces: sound, vision, and text. He has obscured the performing bodies, yet each space is filled with transmissions from these performances.

- Are you being invited into a process of disorientation?
- Where do your senses draw you?
- As you move around do you need to abandon some senses and privilege others?

By inhabiting the central wall, St-Onge literally embodies the Gallery. Think of the wall as a nervous system sending out signals, an organ processing and circulating material, a mouth-like chamber where sound is formed, or a skin or casing.

- How do you consider your role as a visitor in relation to an absent, hidden or surrogate body?
- Knowing the wall's place in the project, how does its new presence reorient your understanding of the Gallery's architecture?
- How does your ability to wander throughout the gallery compare with St-Onge's enclosure within the wall? Does this affect your movement?

In one room texts overflow across monitors and out from under the wall. St-Onge's exchanges with his collaborators are central to his project, yet how do you dialogue with these transmissions?

- Where does your voice enter when responding to the illegible?
- Is there a hallucinatory element: do you add, hear, or understand things that are not there?
- How is your body involved in making or performing language? Consider how even as language breaks down, text continues to carry and provoke sound.

Leaving traces throughout the duration of his project St-Onge has arranged the Gallery as a mnemonic or memorial space.

- How might you use memory as a compass, as a tool for orientation?
- Can you easily differentiate between the live, in process elements and past developments?
- Do you draw on approximation, on memories of past spaces or experiences to navigate the Gallery?

In the spirit of experimentation, St-Onge works within a set of proposed limits. Consider the conditions adopted to make room for improvisation and the emergence of unexpected results.

- When do you find yourself within the limits of the experiment? At its edges? Or outside looking in?
- Is there room for failure? What happens when you allow failure to become a part of your experience?
- What is an experimental form of viewing or visiting?



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